

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8879

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 03292

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: MARR, PFOR, MU, US, UK

SUBJECT: CONTINUED INTEREST IN MASIRAH ARRANGEMENTS

REF: MUSCAT 242 (NOTAL), DOHA 235 (NOTAL)

1. WE ARE UNABLE TO MAKE ANY SENSE OUT OF FEBRUARY 20 AL-AKHBAR INTERVIEW WITH OMANI UNDER SECRETARY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AL-ALAWI REPORTED MUSCAT REFTEL. UK LEASE ON MASIRAH IS FOR 99 YEARS FROM 1958. WHILE BRITISH MAY DECIDE TO LEAVE EARLIER, AGREEMENT WILL NOT "EXPIRE" IN ANYTHING LIKE TWO TO THREE YEARS.

2. AS TO AL-ALAWI'S STATEMENT THAT NO AGREEMENT HAS BEEN REACHED ON USG REQUEST, THAT IS LITERALLY CORRECT (AN OFTEN MISLEADING LITERALNESS IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS SEEMS
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TO BE AN OMANI CHARACTERISTIC VIZ THEIR EARLIER STATEMENT

RE "DEPARTURE" OF IRANIAN TROOPS FROM ONE PLACE IN DHOFAR-- ONLY TO RETURN IN ANOTHER). WE DO NOT KNOW IF AL-ALAWI INTENDED TO RAISE POSSIBILITY THAT OMANIS MIGHT BACK OUT (PER COMMENT MUSCAT 242) BUT LINE HE FOLLOWED HAS BEEN AGREED AMONG USG, HMG, AND OMANI GOVERNMENT, AT BRITISH REQUEST. THIS REQUEST CAME RIGHT AFTER SULTAN'S VISIT TO US AND IS INTENDED TO DISSIPATE ANY PRESSURE THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE FOCUS ON BRITISH DECISION MAKERS ALONE. THAT IS THE REASON ALSO FOR LINE ENNALS AND OTHER UK SPOKESMEN TAKE PUBLICLY (DOHA REFTEL).

3. ACTUALLY, FCO HAS PRESS SUMMARY REPORT OF AN AL-AKHBAR INTERVIEW WITH AL-ALAWI WHICH APPEARS TO PREDATE ONE CITED MUSCAT REFTEL. IT WAS CABLED FEBRUARY 15 AND WAS PRETTY ANODYNE, CONTAINING NOTHING ALONG LINES OF CITED INTERVIEW. IS VERSION THAT APPEARED IN OMANI LOCAL PRESS A LATER INTERVIEW WHICH HAS NOT BEEN NOTICED BY THE BRITISH, OR SOME SORT OF FABRICATION? FOR THAT MATTER, WE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN MUSCAT'S ASSESSMENT OF AL-ALAWI'S ABILITY AND RELIABILITY. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD HE IS A FORMER OPPONENT OF THE SULTAN'S REGIME WHO RETURNED AND WAS APPOINTED TO HIS PRESENT POSITION AS NO. 2 IN FOREIGN MINISTRY WITH GOOD PROSPECTS OF INHERITING TOP JOB WHEN ZAWAWI MOVES ON.

4. FCO (AND WE) DO NOT REPEAT NOT HAVE IMPRESSION THAT OMANIS ARE LIKELY TO BACK OFF THEIR AGREEMENT TO USG OCCASIONAL USE OF MASIRAH. BRITISH THEMSELVES WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY AGREE ONCE WE HAVE PROVIDED REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONS THEY ASKED SEVERAL WEEKS AGO.

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